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SUBJECT: SINGAPORE HOSTS FIRST-EVER ARF EXERCISE

11. (U) SUMMARY: Singapore hosted a multilateral Maritime Security Shore Exercise (SHOREX) January 22-23 -- the first exercise conducted under the auspices of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The exercise appeared to fulfill its goals of building capacity and demonstrating the advantages of close multilateral and interagency cooperation in responding to a maritime emergency. Twenty-two member countries/organizations participated, with representatives coming mostly from operational maritime security agencies. Participants reported in a final debriefing that the exercise had been useful and instructive. U.S. participants included representatives from the US Pacific Command, Coast Guard, Department of State, and Embassy. Singapore views this event as a precedent for additional ARF exercises to improve operational cooperation in other areas, including disaster relief, search and rescue, law enforcement and environmental protection. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) On January 22-23, Singapore hosted a Maritime Security Shore Exercise (SHOREX), the first exercise activity conducted by the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The SHOREX was designed to build capacity and to demonstrate the importance of multilateral and interagency cooperation, in particular information-sharing, in responding to a maritime security incident. Participants were principally representatives of ARF members' operational maritime security agencies (including navies, coast guards and marine police), though other ministries, such as Transport and Foreign Affairs, were represented as well. U.S. participants included naval and coast guard officers from US Pacific Command, Joint Interagency Task Force-West (JIATF-West) and PACAREA, as well as State Department officials. Twenty-two ARF member countries and organizations participated, including representatives from China, Russia, India, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

13. (U) The SHOREX consisted of three phases, including a professional exchange, a table-top exercise and an operational simulation conducted at the Singapore Navy's Tactical Training Center. The professional exchanges consisted of briefings by selected countries on various topics affecting maritime security, including search and rescue procedures, interagency coordination systems, border protection, international cooperation programs, and policy issues. The U.S. briefing was unique in highlighting the importance of pre-arranged legal agreements in confronting various transnational maritime security threats. The Singapore-based ReCAAP Information Sharing Center also provided a briefing. ReCAAP (the "Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia") is mandated to share information and build capacity to address piracy.

The Exercise

14. (U) The table-top exercise included discussions regarding appropriate responses to various situations involving a missing ship in international waters. These discussions highlighted the need for multilateral efforts in addressing the potential security implications of such a maritime scenario. The subsequent computer-based simulation involved working through the tactical response to the scenario, which highlighted the need for such factors as information sharing, decision-making architectures and pre-arranged agreements. A debriefing at the end of the SHOREX indicated a high degree of satisfaction among participants that the exercise had met its goals. Several expressed an interest in participating in future exercises.

GOS Pleased, Hopes for More ARF Exercises

15. (SBU) Embassy and State Department officials met with MFA and Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) officials after the SHOREX to discuss the exercise and other issues associated with maritime security in the Straits of Malacca. MPA and MFA officials were clearly pleased with the result. Recalling initial Indonesian and Malaysian suspicions that such an exercise might infringe sovereignty or turn into a thinly-veiled PSI event, our MPA contact reported that his Indonesian counterpart had found the exercise useful, suggesting that additional exercises be held and supporting the need for "fixed protocols" in dealing with certain situations, such as search and rescue. The Malaysian delegation had been considerably less engaged during the SHOREX than during the planning meeting, the GOS was not sure if that was due to substantive or logistical reasons. The GOS officials thought the SHOREX had succeeded in raising ARF members' comfort level with joint exercises, and expressed hope that it would lead to other exercises, including operational field exercises. In line with US views, they

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thought that additional functional areas for collaborative effort should be addressed, including disaster relief, search and rescue, counter-drug and other law enforcement issues, and environmental protection.

16. (SBU) GOS officials told us they thought Indonesia and Malaysia would continue to decline to participate in ReCAAP due to lingering sensitivities over the placement of the Information Center in Singapore. However, the ReCAAP Governing Council had decided the Center would provide relevant information to Indonesia and Malaysia at the operational level, hoping eventually to influence policy views after the utility of such sharing had been demonstrated. To facilitate such an approach, ReCAAP's Governing Council had already approved collaboration with non-state parties. GOS officials reiterated that it would be more helpful for the United States to delay any decision to accede to ReCAAP until Indonesia and Malaysia had decided to come on board.

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